

MAURY MAVERICK BRIDGE
(Jendrusch Bridge)
County Road 207 Bridge
Texas Historic Bridges Recording Project II
Spanning the San Antonio River at County Rt. 207
Falls City vicinity
Karnes County
Texas

HAER No. TX-82

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TEX
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
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MAURY MAVERICK BRIDGE HAER No. TX-82

(COUNTY ROAD 20

(COUNTY ROAD 207 BRIDGE)

Location:

**Spanning the San Antonio River at Jendrusch Road
(County Road 207) Falls City vicinity, Karnes County,
Texas**

UTM: 14/534290/3204722

USGS Quad: Falls City, Tex.

(7.5-minute series, 1961)

Date of Construction:

1932

Fabricator:

Attributed to Austin Bridge Company, Dallas, Texas

Present Owner:

Texas Department of Transportation

Present Use:

Not in service

Significance:

This bridge is one of two remaining in the state that features a polygonal-top-chord Warren pony truss greater than 100' in length as a main truss span. It is also one of five multiple truss bridges in Texas with a polygonal-top-chord Warren truss as its main span.

Historian:

Peggy Hardman, Ph.D., August 2000

Project Information:

This document was prepared as a part of the Texas Historic Bridges Recording Project II performed during the summer of 2000 by the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER). The project was sponsored by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Environmental Affairs Division.

INTRODUCTION

The 1932 Maury Maverick Bridge, spans the San Antonio River at Jendrusch Road (County Road 207) Falls City in Karnes County, Texas. It is a metal truss bridge consisting of one main 114'-0" polygonal-top-chord Warren pony truss, with a 57'-0" straight-top-chord Warren pony truss at each end. Eight timber approach spans, varying in length from 18'-0" to 19'-4", lead to the bridge from the south, but there are no approach spans at the north end. Reinforced concrete piers consisting of columns connected by a solid concrete web wall, support the main truss. The southern truss span is supported by three square concrete pilings with a concrete cap. The roadway measures 15'-7" in width.¹ The bridge is named after Fontain Maury Maverick, Bexar County Tax Collector, who helped the Karnes County commissioners procure funds to build it.²

The bridge trusses are riveted, but bolts replace worn or broken rivets. The members are stamped "Bethlehem Steel." The timber deck, not the original, has planks of varying sizes, 3" x 8" and 3" x 12". The timber stringers are 3" x 12"; their spacing varies. Timber piles measure 10'-0". Bridge railings are an obsolete type, made of 2.9" outside diameter steel pipe.³

The three truss spans are attributed to the Austin Bridge Company. Documentation is not available supporting provenance, but the company, now called Austin Industries, believes them to be theirs. The claim is based on technology involved in the trusses, especially the configuration of the gusset plates. Their shape and rivet configuration is found on other Austin Bridge structures.⁴

MAURY MAVERICK BRIDGE SIGNIFICANCE

The Maury Maverick multiple truss bridge is significant in that it is one only of two structures remaining in Texas featuring a polygonal-top-chord Warren truss with a span greater than 100' (most are between 60'-100' in length). The other bridge, the Leon River Bridge, in

¹ "Historic Bridge Inventory Record," Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation, 11 February 1994.

² Fabian Jendrusch, telephone interview by author, Seguin, Tex., 12 July 2000. The Jendrusch family is one of the earliest to settle in the Falls City area, and owned land along the river where the bridge went in. Maverick served as Tax Collector of Bexar County between 1930 and 1934.

³ "Historic Bridge Inventory," 11 February 1994. Please see field notes for "Bridge Inspection and Appraisal Program Field Drawings."

⁴ David Vance, Director of Communications, Austin Industries, telephone interview by author, Austin, Texas, 9 July 2000. Please see field notes for black and white photographs. H. G. Quinn, Photographer, Texas Department of Transportation.

Coryell County, is 107' long. Austin Brothers built the Leon River Bridge around 1919.⁵

Engineers of that period experimented in several ways with the historic style of the Warren truss. Curving the top chord along a polygonal profile allowed greater length and a more efficient use of material than a standard Warren Struss. The type became popular in the first two decades of the twentieth century with improvements in steel fabrication and field riveting, making it a favorite with early state and county highway engineers.⁶

A livestock ranching and farming center, Karnes County is southeast of San Antonio in the Rio Grande plain region of Texas. The first land grant in the area of present Karnes County, issued 12 April 1758, went to Andres Hernandez and Luis Antonio Menchaca who established ranches between the San Antonio River and Cibolo Creek. Before the mid-1800s, frequent raids by the Comanche discouraged population growth in the area.⁷

Anglo-American settlers moved into the area in larger numbers by the 1840s, settling first at Helena, located at a bend of the San Antonio River. Helena grew to become an important stage stop, banking, and mercantile center. In 1853, Helena founders Thomas Ruckman and Lewis S. Owings petitioned the state legislature to create the county of Karnes, named for Henry Wax Karnes, Texas Ranger, and a participant in the Texas independence movement. In 1854, the legislature complied, designating Helena the county seat. That same year, a large number of Poles from Upper Silesia settled in the county at the junction of the San Antonio River and Cibolo Creek to establish Panna Maria, the first Polish colony in the United States.⁸

Little changed in the county until after the Civil War, when the San Antonio and Arkansas Pass Railway arrived.⁹ According to local legend, an 1886 squabble between the leading citizens of Helena caused the railroad to bypass the town and go through the new community of Karnes City. Not quite a decade later, the county seat followed.¹⁰

After this move Karnes County residents continued to rely on ranching, but in 1930 oil drilling began, and in the early 1950s, uranium mining. A uranium-ore processing mill near

⁵ Historic Bridge Inventory," Waco District, Bridge No. AA02-10-001, Texas Department of Transportation, n.d.

⁶ Joseph E. King, *Spans of Time: Oklahoma Historic Highway Bridges* (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech University, Center for Historic Preservation and Technology, 1993), 46-47.

⁷ Christopher Long, "Karnes County," in *The New Handbook of Texas*, vol. 3 (Austin: Texas Historical Association, 1996), 1035-36.

⁸ Long, "Karnes County," 1036.

⁹ Long, "Karnes County," 1034.

¹⁰ Dorothy Wood, Curator, Helena Museum, interview by author, Helena, Tex., 12 July 2000.

Falls City operated until the early 1990s.¹¹ The unprecedented wealth generated by the oil and uranium industries allowed the county to build Falls City, the community nearest the Maury Maverick Bridge, is seven miles northwest of Karnes City. Originally named Brackenridge, in honor of George W. Brackenridge, a benefactor of the San Antonio and Arkansas Pass Railway, the residents changed the name to Falls City in 1893 after a stretch of the San Antonio River having several small waterfalls.¹² The community's largest landowner, James Rumsey Skiles, owned 1,500 acres adjoining the south bank of the San Antonio River. At Skiles Falls he built a gristmill. He owned slaves and built a huge mansion, the remains of which can still be seen on County Road 207.¹³

A couple of decades into the new century, people living along the San Antonio River's south bank grew weary of having to travel around the river to reach businesses in Falls City, and wanted to build a crossing in the vicinity of the Maury Maverick Bridge. Since no road beyond a wagon road to the Skiles mansion existed, the proposed road and bridge building project aroused stubborn responses for supporters and opponents alike. Some landowners along the river refused to cooperate, but Ed Jendrusch, a member of the County Commissioners' Court, proved willing to give up some his land to the project.¹⁴

Accordingly, Commissioner Jendrusch and like-minded folks approached Texas politician and Bexar County tax collector (later mayor and New Deal congressman) Fontaine Maury Maverick for help in finding a bridge. The Commissioners' Court sitting at the time of the project passed measures allowing a road to be constructed, cutting through the old Skiles property. The Jendrusch family, "perhaps going fifty-fifty with nearby neighbors," sold river bottomland to the county for the project.¹⁵ Grateful to Maverick for his help at the opening of the bridge, the county commissioner added his name to the bridge builders plates.¹⁶

Considering Maverick's connections in the state, it would not be surprising for him to have friends at the Austin Bridge Company who helped him locate a bridge suitable for the new San Antonio River crossing near Falls City. Frank E. and George L. Austin, who began their

¹¹ Long, "Karnes County" 1034, 1036.

¹² Long, "Karnes County" 942.

¹³ James Rumsey Skiles platted a utopian community one mile south of the present Falls City. Designed with streets 100' to 150' in width, schools, churches, libraries, parks, and other amenities, he hoped to attract settlers and businesses in numbers great enough to lure the San Antonio-Goliad traffic to his town, a place he named Marcelina. A plat of Marcelina is in private ownership in Falls City. Jendrusch, telephone interview. See also, Robert J. Thonhoff, "Marcelina, Texas," in *The New Handbook of Texas*, 4:500.

¹⁴ Jendrusch, telephone interview by author, Seguin, Tex., 24 July 2000.

¹⁵ Jendrusch, telephone interview.

¹⁶ The plaques are no longer on the bridge. The author is grateful to Fabian Jendrusch for locating and providing the information contained on them.

business in the 1890s, saw their company become the state's largest bridge manufacturing firm. The company not only built bridges and relocated them, but also fabricated steel and constructed roads all over the state.¹⁷

Austin Brothers' bridges built during the first decade of the twentieth century generally carried, according to their *Catalog and Hand-Book for Buyers, Engineers, Builders*, six to ten ton loads and accommodated roadway widths from 12' to 16'.¹⁸ As the state highway systems developed, and traffic increased, many of the original structures needed replacing with sturdier bridges. The old structures relocated, mostly in rural areas with light traffic, rivers, or creek crossings. The Maury Maverick Bridge fits this profile. There is no record indicating that the Maury Maverick Bridge was a new construction, and residents of the area remember that workers "riveted it together on site." Most likely, the bridge arrived at the railroad depot in Falls City in sections. Once carried to the site on the river, reassembling took place.¹⁹

The bridge, dedicated and opened in 1932, is not a Works Progress Administration (WPA) bridge, as is often cited. Information on the bridge plaque confirms the 1932 date.²⁰ Fabian Jendrusch likes to tell the story that his father built the bridge for his birthday; Fabian arrived in April 1932.²¹ If further evidence is needed, the WPA did not exist in 1932; the program began in 1933 as part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal relief measures.

The Maury Maverick Bridge is scheduled for removal and relocation by the Texas Department of Transportation. A new concrete structure will be built across the San Antonio River at County Road 207. A catastrophic flood in 1998 destroyed the approach spans to the bridge and buckled the deck timbers.²² The trusses show problems associated with use and systematic maintenance. All members exhibit rusting, and bent no. 2 at the foundation is severely eroded. Spalling has exposed reinforcing bars at the truss bearing on the north abutment. According to a 1998 Texas Department of Transportation "Bridge Summary and

¹⁷ *Austin Bridge Company and Associated Companies: The First 50 Years, 1918-1968* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1974), 20.

¹⁸ *Austin Bridge Company*.

¹⁹ Jendrusch, telephone interview.

²⁰ The plaques, 18"x12", are identical and inscribed: MAURY MAVERICK BRIDGE, 1932. Individuals listed include, M. E. Bartlett, Superintendent of Construction, and George H. Bradford, Construction Engineer. County Commissioners Rudolf Best, Ed Jendrusch, Roy Neuman, and H. H. Steves. Judge Thomas B. Smiley also appears.

²¹ Jendrusch, telephone interview.

²² Please see fieldnotes: black and white photographs, H.G. Quinn, Photographer, Texas Department of Transportation. Credit: These black and white photographs provide a graphic illustration of the 1998 flood damage to the bridge.

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Improvement Recommendation," an upgrade is not "feasible," and the "quality of members is so weak as to warrant replacement." Local residents understand those findings; some reporting that since the 1980s, they crossed the bridge with their vehicle doors open to be prepared to jump if it collapsed.²³

At the time of documentation the Maury Maverick bridge is closed. Concerned residents have rescued the plaques from vandals, and understand that the structure will be put to use in another community. The Maury Maverick Bridge is a significant reminder of bridge technology in a small Texas town along the San Antonio River. With rehabilitation and maintenance, it will offer years of service to residents of Alvin, Texas, the proposed new home.

²³ Please see fieldnotes: black and white photographs, H.G. Quinn, Photographer, Texas Department of Transportation. Credit: These black and white photographs provide a graphic illustration of the 1998 flood damage to the bridge.

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